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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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WHAT'S NEW?

Picking Parents For Poinsettias. Four new varieties of poinsettias--three with white flowers, one with red--will be available to home gardeners by Christmas 1966. They have been developed by U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists through crossbreeding. Previously, new poinsettia varieties just happened--as freaks of nature. Now they're being developed through careful scientific research--and, as a result, are much better plants than their parents. They are easier to grow, hold their foliage and flowers longer, and have tighter blooms. Look for Snowcaps with the whitest flowers yet; the Snowflake, with stiff stems and large clear-white flowers; White Cloud, a tall plant with strong stiff stems and creamy-white flowers; and Stoplight, a shapely poinsettia with glowing red flowers.

Paint and Polish. You may not have missed them, but fuzzy paint rollers--the kind made of sheepskins with the wool cut short--are back. For a while, when water-based paints came on the market, sheepskin rollers gave way to synthetic roller covers which were more resistant to chemical attack and shrinkage. Then, the U.S. Department of Agriculture discovered a new tanning method. This has put the sheepskins back in competition--as wax applicators and polishers as well as paint rollers. Sheepskin covers work especially well because they're absorbent and spread the paint and polish evenly.

Deep Freeze for Castor Oil. Castor oil is being taken out of the medicine cabinet and put into the freezer. Research scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture find castor oil and its derivatives can be made into a high-quality urethane foam for insulating refrigerators and freezers. The castor-based foam is strong, has good insulating ability, and is fire resistant. It could be used in other things besides home refrigeration units--as an insulation in prefab walls, roofs and floors, and in the construction of refrigerated ships, railcars and trucks. In Minneapolis, researchers, working under a USDA contract, are now conducting large-scale machine-foaming studies to develop industrial processing techniques.



IN RESEARCH

This Little Pig. Out at Beltsville, Md.--in the U.S. Department of Agriculture research labs--there are a lot of little pigs that will never go to market. They are miniatures that the scientists are using for experimental purposes. Hogs, it seems, are much like people. They are subject to many of the same maladies. They have about the same food requirements, digest food in much the same way--even suffer from peptic ulcers. And a hog's heart and major blood vessels resemble those of humans. Small-size hogs (the miniatures) require smaller doses of costly experimental drugs, are less expensive to house, are easier to handle. That's why these little pigs will stay home--to help science learn more about you and your body.

Lying to Layers. How's a chicken to know when she's being short-changed? It's impossible, say U.S. Department of Agriculture poultry specialists. And they're taking advantage of the situation. Researchers are regulating the light-dark period of a test flock of hens--to see if they can get the hens' laying mechanism to operate on an 18-hour instead of 24-hour day. For the chickens, it will mean 486.6 working days per year--and, the specialists hope, a proportionately greater number of eggs in their baskets.

INFORMATION TO WRITE FOR

Consumer Information. What's your interest, your need, your problem? Appliances... money...recreation...or food. You'll find out where to get information on these and numerous other consumer questions from the new Consumer Information catalog put out by the Government Printing Office. The catalog provides a quick listing of all current consumer booklets published by the Federal government. Publications printed in Spanish appear in a special section, and for the senior citizen there's a selected listing printed in large, easy-to-read type. Single copies of this catalog are available without charge from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Or you can buy them in quantity at the special price of \$7.50 per 100.

Skiing. You'll find some of the best ski areas in the country in our National Forests. There are 169 to choose from. Where they are and what facilities they offer is explained in the new "Skiing" booklet published by the Forest Service. The booklet also gives a brief history of skiing in the United States, of avalanche control and the Forest Service's Snow Rangers. To obtain a copy of "Skiing" write to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. It costs 20 cents.

Medicare and You. Concerned about what Medicare will and will not pay? You may want to get a two-page summary reprinted from USDA's "Farm Index" magazine. It shows, for example, that you pay only the first \$40 of any hospital bill; Medicare's hospital coverage pays nearly all other reasonable charges (private nurses, private rooms and the like are extra). You pay the first \$50 a year in doctor and other medical bills; Medicare's doctor and medical coverage pays 80 percent of the remaining reasonable charges. And you can use your own physician. Coverage starts when you reach age 65--if you take timely action. For a free copy of "Medicare: Its Impact on Rural America," ERS-272, write OMS-DI, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

IN THE YARD AND GARDEN

New Ground Cover. Here's a new way to whip crabgrass. Smother it with Euonymus fortunei Longwood. This ground cover, from the slopes of Mt. Tsubuka in Japan makes so dense a cover that crabgrass seeds can't get enough light to germinate. Longwood can be grown in almost any part of the country. It can survive temperatures as low as -25° F. and as high as 105°--though in such heat there is some sunscald. It has small dark green leaves, is low, and does not pile up. And it's especially good in the shade or in partially shaded areas, or as a cover on low masonry walls. The plant, brought to this country by U.S. Department of Agriculture plant explorers, is now being distributed to experiment stations, arboreta and nurserymen. It should be available to the public in limited supply next fall, generally by the spring of 1967.

HOUSING AND HOME EQUIPMENT

A Second Home. Be a two-house family. You can build the second house yourself--an inexpensive one-bedroom cabin for vacations in the mountains or at the seashore. And if you choose a plan with clear-span trusses, you can live in it while you build it. U.S. Department of Agriculture engineers have developed just the house. The interior can be finished as one large room--then when you have more time and money, you can throw up the partitions. Another good feature: The partitions are movable, should the lady-of-the-house ever want to rearrange things. Complete working drawings may be obtained through your county Extension agent. Ask him for House Plan No. 5968.

On Air. It's no dream. It's available--now. A refrigerator that floats. An air cushion device, activated by fingertip control, floats the refrigerator a fraction of an inch above the floor, so it can be easily moved. Other refrigerators now come with wheels for easy moving. Other things to look for in the year ahead, according to the recent Agricultural Outlook Conference, are refrigerators with seven-day meat keepers and adjustable, many-position shelves. Also, all but the least expensive models will be frost-free. More than 175,000 units will have automatic ice makers.

PESTS

A Cure for Insects. Some people still prefer to home-cure their meats. For those who do, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has published a bulletin telling how to protect this meat from insects. Single copies may be obtained free from the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Send your request on a postcard, ask for HG-109, "Protecting Home-Cured Meat from Insects," and be sure to include you ZIP code.

Repellent for Repugnant Leeches. America's fighting forces in Vietnam have run into another bloody enemy--leeches. Although these blood-suckers do not transmit diseases, they do cause bleeding. To help our servicemen, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has developed a repellent that works for both land and water leeches. A combination of 75 percent lanolin (so it sticks to you) and 25 percent DEET (to keep off the leeches), the repellent can be applied to skin or clothing.

AT THE SUPERMARKET

More Elbow Room. Tomorrow's supermarkets will be bigger and better--and prices may even be lower. According to marketing specialists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, you may soon be shopping in the backroom as well. It, too, will be devoted to displaying foods. Trimming and packaging operations will be located elsewhere--at some central location in the city--for a reduction of \$15,000 per store in equipment alone. As a bonus to consumers, the foods will come in more attractive displays, with less waste, longer shelf life and better quality. And because there'll be more room, shoppers will be more likely to find their favorite brand or product in stock.

More Coupon Shoppers. Some 800,000 needy people in all parts of the country are now putting more food in their market baskets each week--and, as a result, better meals on their tables. This extra boost in buying power comes from the Food Stamp Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture which allows low-income families to exchange the amount of money they normally spend on food for coupons worth much more at the grocery store. In January this program was extended to Stearns county, Minnesota; Franklin county, Ohio; Cherokee county, South Carolina; Davis county, Utah; and Milwaukee county, Wisconsin. People in 196 areas in 36 states and the District of Columbia now shop with food coupons.

Inspected - Graded. There's a difference--between USDA inspection and USDA grading of meat and poultry. The inspection mark tells you it's a wholesome product. The grade mark tells the quality. An item may be inspected but not graded; but never graded without inspection. The law requires that all meat and poultry moving across State lines be inspected. But grading is not required. Grades are for your convenience, an impartial rating that makes comparison shopping easy. So look for both the USDA inspection and USDA grade marks on the meat and poultry you buy.

Jetting Foods to You. Fresh fruits and vegetables from California are appearing regularly on Midwest and Eastern dinner tables. Many gourmet items are coming by air--often by jet. During the first 9 months of 1965, California producers air-shipped over 1,100 carlots of fresh fruits and vegetables--a 60 percent increase over the same period a year earlier. Strawberries travel the farthest, oftenest. Over a half million pounds even went to Frankfurt, Germany last year.

Bringing Home the Bacon. Most people buy bacon by the pound. They don't expect a 12-ounce package. For this reason, the U.S. Department of Agriculture insists that a package of "odd" weight proclaim this weight large and clear on the label. The public should be made aware of the fact they are getting less, USDA believes.

Pick the Plentifuls. Shop the plentifuls and you shop economically. It's that old rule of supply and demand. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says these foods will be in good supply in February--canned red salmon, prunes and prune products (they're the featured items), red tart cherries, oranges, grapefruit, onions, and potatoes. If you live east of the Rockies, you'll also find lots of sweetpotatoes on the market.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Jeanne S. Park, Editor, SERVICE, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.